



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Adrian Steirn: A biography**

Among a diversity of photographic opportunities he has had around the world, perhaps closest to Adrian Steirn's heart has been his work with Nelson Mandela, whom he has photographed several times and whose 93<sup>rd</sup> and 94<sup>th</sup> birthdays he was invited to photograph, exclusively, in 2011 and 2012. Each time Steirn spent several days with the Mandela family at Madiba's house in Qunu, Eastern Cape, and produced a series of deeply personal and intimate photographs.

It was also his admiration for Madiba and what the statesman had achieved in uniting the people of South Africa post-democracy that inspired Steirn to create **21 Icons South Africa**. "Wherever I take photographs in the world, people always ask about Madiba. It got me thinking about his legacy and what it means to both the country and the world. This brought me to the realisation that he had not acted alone and that there were many more distinguished, wonderful and worthy people that have made South Africa what it is."

And so Steirn decided to tackle his most ambitious project to date: filming and photographing a series of icons, whom he defines as "men and women who lead extraordinary lives that have a positive impact on those around them".

He wanted to shoot meaningful portraits that would make people question the stories behind them. As an artist for whom narrative is everything, these backstories are as interesting and relevant as the photographs — and they took **21 Icons South Africa** to another level. "The bond that developed through crafting each person's portrait gave rise to amazing

interviews and films, which I think people will love to see," says Steirn.

He hopes to take the **21 Icons** project to the rest of the world after its launch in South Africa because, he says, it is important to create a collection of icons that can inspire tomorrow's leaders. "We are bound by our cultures and if we could somehow understand the icons of other cultures, say, for example, understanding what it's like to be a musician in Iran or an Indian scientist, we could gain insight into their culture and create a worldwide movement of people who do what icons do: work hard to make the world a better place."

Cross-cultural experiences are Steirn's passion and have been responsible for much of how he spends his career. In a mere decade of working professionally as a photographer, the 33-year-old (turning 34 on August 12) has crammed in more notable achievements, extraordinary journeys and accolades than many of his peers in their entire careers.

Born in Sydney, Australia, Steirn fell in love with South Africa during a trip as a six-year-old child and, after several more visits to the country and the rest of the continent, decided to make Cape Town his permanent base in 2008. Here he is the director of the Ginkgo Agency, a content-creation company that offers film, photographic, research, graphic design, writing and post-production services to clients seeking to reach and inspire a global audience.

Portraiture is a central passion for Steirn. It earned him the Portrait Photographer of the Year Award at the Africa Photographic Awards in 2010, as well as the Nikon Africa Professional Photographer of the Year Award in 2009.

Renowned South African artist William Kentridge has said of Steirn's portraiture: "Adrian Steirn's photographs have an inventiveness and wit. He is able both to perceive unusual perspectives on his subjects and — vital for a portraitist — is able to convince his



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subject to participate in his exploration. Together with this, he brings a technical mastery that is tested to its limits by his perfectionism.”

In October 2011, Steirn chronicled the final days of Lord Philip Gould, political adviser and architect of Britain’s New Labour, as he was dying from cancer. It resulted in a moving film called “When I Die: Lessons from the Death Zone”, and a portrait Steirn took of Gould, standing at his gravesite, is on permanent display in the National Gallery in London.

Steirn has also shot deeply engaging portraits of heads of state such as former UK prime minister Tony Blair, Rwandan President Paul Kagame, President Alpha Conde of Guinea, former Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, and former Japanese prime minister Yoshiro Mori. Artists he has photographed and filmed include Irish singer Bono and British singer-songwriter Annie Lennox, as well as South Africa’s pre-eminent film actress, Charlize Theron.

He was the director of the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria’s 10-year anniversary film. His portraits of, among others, Aids campaigner Zachie Achmat, Microsoft boss and philanthropist Bill Gates, Bono and US economist Jeffrey Sachs were presented at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last year. He was commissioned by the UK Government’s Department of Health to commemorate Alzheimer’s Day through a film and portraits of loved ones suffering from dementia, including Sir Michael Parkinson.

But Steirn also has another deeply felt passion: Africa and its wildlife. He has been photographing both for 15 years, producing stunning and unusual fine-art portraits of animals and the landscape. “All I can offer is my humblest interpretation of what inspires me about Africa,” he says. “My wildlife images are not a project or study. They are images I have shot for no other reason than they were beautiful to me.”

Steirn’s wildlife projects have taken him, among other places, to the Serengeti in Tanzania and the Zambezi River in Zambia and Zimbabwe, as well as the Amazon basin in South America and Azerbaijan’s Hirkan National Park in Eastern Europe. He has been the photographer-in-residence for the World Wide Fund for Nature in South Africa for the past three years, and is represented by the Everard Read Gallery in Johannesburg.

Steirn’s website can be viewed at [www.adriansteirn.com](http://www.adriansteirn.com) and his agency can be contacted at [www.ginkgoagency.com](http://www.ginkgoagency.com).

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On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**

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